



PETROICA MULTICOLOR, *S. 1844*



# PETROICA MULTICOLOR, Swains.

## Scarlet-breasted Robin.

*Muscicapa multicolor*, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 243.

*Red-breasted Warbler*, Lewin, Birds of New Holl., pl. 17.

*Petroica multicolor*, Swains. Zool. Ill., 2nd Ser. pl. 36.—Gould in Syn. of Birds of Australia, Part I.—G. R. Gray, List of Gen. of Birds, 2nd Edit., p. 30.

*Goó-ba*, Aborigines of Western Australia.

*Robin*, Colonists.

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THIS beautiful Robin is a denizen of the wide extent of country reaching from New South Wales on the east to Swan River on the west, including Van Diemen's Land and all the small islands lying off the southern coast. In Van Diemen's Land it is much less common than on the continent, and is also far less numerous than its near ally, the *Petroica phænicea*. I have not been able with any degree of certainty to trace how far it proceeds northwards. I believe, however, that a few degrees from the latitude of Sydney is the limit of its range in that direction.

Although closely allied to the *Petroica phænicea*, its structure on examination will be found to present some trifling modification, which better adapts it for arboreal existence; and although frequently on the ground, where it has much of the habits and actions of the *Saxicolinæ*, the low bushes and woods skirting the open plains and sterile districts are its favourite places of resort.

Its food consists solely of insects of various orders, its modified structure enabling it to capture both aphides and swift-flying insects as well as the less agile *Coleoptera*.

When far removed from our native land, recollections and associations are strong incentives to attachment for any object that may remind us of our home; whence this beautiful Robin, which enters the gardens and even the windows of the settlers, is necessarily a great favourite; its attractiveness is moreover much enhanced by its more gay attire, the strong contrasts of scarlet, jet-black and white rendering it one of the most beautiful to behold of any of the birds of Australia. After a careful comparison of a large number of specimens, I feel fully satisfied that the scarlet breast of this species, like that of the Robin of Europe, is assumed during the first autumn, and that it is never again thrown off; but, as might be expected, it is much more brilliant and sparkling during the breeding-season than at any other period of the year. I have remarked that a slight difference exists in the depth of the colouring of specimens from the western and eastern coasts, those from the former, particularly the females, having the scarlet more brilliant and of greater extent than those from New South Wales and Van Diemen's Land; the difference is, however, too trivial to be regarded otherwise than as indicative of a mere variety.

Its song and call-note much resemble that of the European Robin, but are more feeble, and uttered with a more inward tone.

The nest is a very compact structure of dried grasses, narrow strips of bark, mosses and lichens, all bound firmly together with cobwebs and vegetable fibres, and warmly lined with feathers and wool or hair; in some instances I have seen it lined entirely with opossums' hair; it is generally placed in the hollow part of the trunk of a tree, or in a slight cavity in the bark six or seven feet from the ground, but I have found it placed in a fork of a small upright tree more than thirty feet from the ground. The eggs, which are three or four in number, are greenish white, slightly tinged with bluish or flesh-colour, rather minutely freckled with olive-brown and purplish grey, the latter more obscure than the former; these freckles are very generally dispersed over the surface of the shell, but in some instances they also form a zone near the larger end: the medium length of the eggs is nine lines, and breadth seven lines.

It usually rears two or three broods in the year, the period of nidification commencing in August and ending in February.

The male has the head, throat and upper surface black; forehead snowy white; a longitudinal and two oblique bands of white on the wings; breast and upper part of the belly scarlet; lower part of the belly dull white; irides very dark brown; bill and feet black.

The female has all the upper and under surface brown, with the breast strongly tinged with red.

The Plate represents a male and female of the natural size, perched on a sprig of a species of *Corea*, which I found growing on Kangaroo Island.